

The President. Well, I don't know what he's prepared to do. I appreciate the fact that he let our American soldiers come home. That was the right decision. They weren't even involved in the operation.

It seems to me that if he asked the question, what is best for the Serbian people over the long run? What is most likely to preserve the territorial integrity of Serbia over the long run? What is most likely to give us a result where Serbia can join with its neighbors in a common endeavor to promote prosperity and peace and, therefore, the natural strengths that Belgrade and Serbia have because of the size of their country and the abilities of their people? What is most likely to promote that? Then the answer will clearly be: letting the Kosovars come home, having an international force to protect them and the Serb minority in Kosovo, and then getting on about the business of building a better future for all the people of southeastern Europe.

So, I think if the right questions are asked, then this is not a defeat for Serbia we're seeking. What we're seeking is the simple right of the Kosovar Albanians to live in peace on their own land, without fear of cleansing because of their religious or their ethnic background, and a simple statement that in Europe there will be no more ethnic cleansing. We will not usher in the 21st century with the worst nightmares of the 20th.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:09 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Special Envoy and former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin of Russia; Secretary General Javier Solana of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Gen. Wesley K. Clark, USA, Supreme Allied Commander Europe; Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany; and President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). The President also referred to the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

Statement on Tornado Damage in Oklahoma and Kansas

May 4, 1999

My heart goes out to the people of Oklahoma and Kansas who suffered through a night of terror and devastation. Some of the

most powerful tornadoes ever recorded tore through these States last night, killing dozens of people, leveling whole neighborhoods, and leaving more than a thousand families homeless.

In the coming hours, I will declare several counties in both States Federal disaster areas, speeding the way for Federal aid. James Lee Witt, the director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, is now on his way to the region to assess the damage and to assure the people of Oklahoma and Kansas that the Federal Government will provide whatever support is necessary to help them begin putting their communities back together.

Right now, our top priority is to make sure people are safe, that everyone is accounted for, and that initial cleanup can begin. Local and State officials, fire and police, emergency services, and National Guard personnel worked through the night and are doing an outstanding job of helping people through these most difficult hours. The thoughts and prayers of all Americans are with the victims of this tragedy.

Statement on Signing Legislation To Award the Congressional Gold Medal to Rosa Parks

May 4, 1999

I am proud to sign S. 531, a bill which authorizes me to bestow the Congressional Gold Medal to Rosa Parks.

Forty-three years ago, in Alabama, Rosa Parks boarded a public bus, took a seat, and began a remarkable journey. Her action that December day was, in itself, a simple one; but it required uncommon courage. It was a ringing rebuke to those who denied the dignity and restricted the rights of African-Americans. And it was an inspiration to all Americans struggling together to shed the prejudices of the past and to build a better future. Rosa Parks' short bus trip, and all the distance she has traveled in the years since, have brought the American people ever closer to the promised land that we know it can truly be.

NOTE: S. 531, approved May 4, was assigned Public Law No. 106-26.